



On Writing: A Memoir of The Craft

by Stephen King

I actually began *On Writing* in November or December of 1997, and although it usually takes me only three months to finish the first draft of a book, this one was still only half-completed eighteen months later. That was because I'd put it aside in February or March of 1998, not sure how to continue, or if I should continue at all. Writing fiction was almost as much fun as it had ever been, but every word of the nonfiction book was a kind of torture. It was the first book I had put aside uncompleted since *The Stand*, and *On Writing* spent a lot longer in the desk drawer.

In June of 1999, I decided to spend the summer finishing the damn writing book -- let Susan Moldow and Nan Graham at Scribner decide if it was good or bad, I thought. I read the manuscript over, prepared for the worst, and discovered I actually sort of liked what I had. The road to finishing it seemed clear-cut, too. I had finished the memoir ("C.V."), which attempted to show some of the incidents and life-situations which made me into the sort of writer I turned out to be, and I had covered the mechanics -- those that seemed most important to me, at least. What remained to be done was the key section, "On Writing," where I'd try to answer some of the questions I'd been asked in seminars and at speaking engagements, plus all those I *wish* I'd been asked...those questions about the language.

On the night of June seventeenth, blissfully unaware that I was now less than forty-eight hours from my little date with Bryan Smith (not to mention Bullet the rottweiler), I sat down at our dining room table and listed all the questions I wanted to answer, all the points I wanted to address. On the eighteenth, I wrote the first four pages of the "On Writing" section. That was where the work still stood in late July, when I decided I'd better get back to work...or at least try.

I didn't *want* to go back to work. I was in a lot of pain, unable to bend my right knee, and restricted to a walker. I couldn't imagine sitting behind a desk for long, even in my wheelchair. Because of my cataclysmically smashed hip, sitting was torture after forty minutes or so, impossible after an hour and a quarter. Added to this was the book itself, which seemed more daunting than ever -- how was I supposed to write about dialogue, character, and getting an agent when the most pressing thing in my world was how long until the next dose of Percocet?

Yet at the same time I felt I'd reached one of those crossroads moments when you're all out of choices. And I had been in terrible situations before which the writing had helped me get over -- had helped me forget myself for at least a little while. Perhaps it would help me again. It seemed ridiculous to think it might be so, given the level of my pain and physical incapacitation, but there was that voice in the back of my mind, both patient and implacable, telling me that, in the words of the Chambers Brothers, Time Has Come Today. It's possible for me to disobey that voice, but very difficult to disbelieve it.

In the end it was Tabby who cast the deciding vote, as she so often has at crucial moments

in my life. I'd like to think I've done the same for her from time to time, because it seems to me that one of the things marriage is about is casting the tiebreaking vote when you just can't decide what you should do next.

My wife is the person in my life who's most likely to say I'm working too hard, it's time to slow down, stay away from that damn PowerBook for a little while, Steve, give it a rest. When I told her on that July morning that I thought I'd better go back to work, I expected a lecture. Instead, she asked me where I wanted to set up. I told her I didn't know, hadn't even thought about it.

She thought about it, then said: "I can rig a table for you in the back hall, outside the pantry. There are plenty of plug-ins -- you can have your Mac, the little printer, and a fan." The fan was certainly a must -- it had been a terrifically hot summer, and on the day I went back to work, the temperature outside was ninety-five. It wasn't much cooler in the back hall.

Tabby spent a couple of hours putting things together, and that afternoon at four o'clock she rolled me out through the kitchen and down the newly installed wheelchair ramp into the back hall. She had made me a wonderful little nest there: laptop and printer connected side by side, table lamp, manuscript (with my notes from the month before placed neatly on top), pens, reference materials. Standing on the corner of the desk was a framed picture of our younger son, which she had taken earlier that summer.

"Is it all right?" she asked.

"It's gorgeous," I said, and hugged her. It *was* gorgeous. So is she.

The former Tabitha Spruce of Oldtown, Maine, knows when I'm working too hard, but she also knows that sometimes it's the work that bails me out. She got me positioned at the table, kissed me on the temple, and then left me there to find out if I had anything left to say. It turned out I did.

Copyright © 2000 by Stephen King

How do I print part of this page, not all of it?

1. Point your cursor at the start of the content you're interested in.
2. Click and drag until you have highlighted the content you want. Then take your finger off the mouse button!
3. The area you want to print should now be highlighted in blue.
4. Click 'Print This Page' at the top or bottom of this document.
5. The Print Screen should now open. Under 'Page Range' choose 'Selection'.
6. Then click print.



PRINT THIS PAGE

[BookBrowse.com Homepage](#)

CLOSE WINDOW